

TOWN MANAGER'S REPORT

Fiscal Year 2008

Introduction

This year has seen important achievements in the Town of Amherst. The Finance Department will discuss the dramatic improvement in the condition of the Town's Health Insurance Trust Fund, ending the year with a surplus of over \$2,000,000. It was only three years ago that the Health Insurance Trust Fund was in deficit by over \$500,000. Second, the Town Meeting, after much hard work by the Planning Board, Select Board and the Planning Department adopted seven zoning ordinances designed to remove small but important impediments in zoning that restricted economic development. Third, discussions began in earnest to secure the rights to approximately forty acres of land zoned Professional Research Park in North Amherst.

I am deeply grateful for the tremendous support received from the Town departments. Daily, I am reminded of their incomparable professional capability and deep commitment to the people of Amherst. I would also like to congratulate former Select Board members Hwei-Ling Greeney and Rob Kusner for their great accomplishments during their tenure on the Amherst Select Board.

Summary of Activities

Emergency Management

An area that I have been particularly focused upon over the last year has been emergency management. A new emergency management plan has been prepared by Mike Zlogar, Assistant Fire Chief, and has been exercised twice over the last year. No one could remember the last time the original emergency management plan had been exercised. We learned a great deal at the exercises and have modified the emergency operation center and its procedures in accordance with what was learned. A reverse 911 system, capable of telephoning all citizens in the community was acquired and tested successfully. This system allows the Town to contact all or portions of the community by telephone for emergency notification. Citizens, in turn, may add or delete phone numbers off of the Town's website as they see fit. The Health Department, in conjunction with the Five College organization, has been planning for the emergency dispensing of vaccine, in response to the concerns for bio-terrorism and a flu epidemic. That planning includes a facilities study to ascertain the appropriateness of a number of buildings in the community of accommodate emergency dispensing of vaccine.

Kendrick Park

With the conveyance of the title to the Town of the three-acre triangular property located within the bounds of Triangle, North Pleasant and East Pleasant Streets, Amherst has the unique opportunity to plan and create an urban park. This property is the gift of George and Jenny Kendrick, whose estate required that a public park be created. Presently, Kendrick Park is an open parcel with no amenities. A committee has been created to consider the various options for the improvement and use of Kendrick Park, along with planning for how such improvements might be funded. It is not often that a community has the opportunity to create public space in

the center of a town. I look forward to working with the Kendrick Park Committee to plan for the creation of a wonderful public space.

Business Improvement District – Downtown

With the urging of the Promoting Downtown Amherst (PDA) organization, I successfully applied for funding to the Department of Housing and Community Development, Main Street Initiative, to employ a consultant to study the creation of a Business Improvement District (BID) for downtown Amherst. This system, if adopted, would provide supplemental services to enhance the promotion and attractiveness of a downtown. Those supplemental services might include event promotion, downtown beautification such as flowers and shrubs purchase and maintenance, sidewalk cleaning, signs, graffiti maintenance, marketing, parking and other services that are more logically provided through collaboration amongst the merchants. A BID must be approved by a super majority of the property owners within the district in order to be established. A conference with communities that presently operate a BID (Springfield, Westfield, and Hyannis) was held in Amherst. Much was learned of this exciting system at the conference.

Regionalization of Police, Fire and Ambulance Dispatch

I created a regional team last year to consider what opportunities, if any, might exist to consolidate emergency response dispatch among the University of Massachusetts Amherst (UMass), the Town of Hadley and the Town of Amherst. Each entity presently provides its own dispatching with a degree of redundancy and cost duplication. With financial incentives provided by the State 9-1-1 Fund, there may be an opportunity to consider creating a regional dispatch center, funded in part by the State. The next step in this process will be for the three entities to consider funding a feasibility study. A decision will be reached in the fall of 2008 if the next step might be taken.

Health Department – rDNA Regulations

The Health Department and the Board of Health, with the assistance of the University of Massachusetts Amherst, completely reviewed and revised rDNA regulations of the Town of Amherst. This important achievement is critical as the Town pursues those entities with such a background, to develop or expand within Amherst. The new regulations ensure that the Town has an up-to-date procedure that fully provides clear guidelines to entities that employ rDNA and protection to the members of the community.

Amherst Winter Festival

The Leisure Service and Supplemental Education Department (LSSE) created the first Amherst Winter Festival. Conducted at Cherry Hill Golf Course, hundreds of people attended, to watch and participate in the sled races, to enjoy horse and carriage rides, to listen to great music and to enjoy the beautiful winter scene. The weather cooperated, snowing with just enough vigor to cover the grounds with a fresh coat of snow. The event was conducted in partnership with our great friends, the Amherst Area Chamber of Commerce. This important first-time event provided us the opportunity to show off the great beauty of Cherry Hill and to allow the community to think of Cherry Hill as something other than a golf course. Cherry Hill is a

magnificent public asset and it was certainly enjoyed on that crystal winter day by many of our friends and citizens.

Amherst College

The relationship between Amherst College and the Town of Amherst could not be better. Last year, Amherst College gave an unrestricted gift to the Town of \$120,000.00. Further, Amherst College continues to urge the Town to share information about its needs as it pursues economic development opportunities. With the recent commitment of Amherst College to renovate the Lord Jeffery Inn and to create a conference center, Amherst College has established the important role that it plays in enhancing and stabilizing downtown Amherst. Long term, I hope to be able to build on the terrific relationship that Amherst College and the Town of Amherst enjoys to the benefit of both.

I look forward to working with the Select Board, Town Meeting, committees and boards to meet the needs of our citizens. Amherst is a beautiful jewel and its sheen is the result of your efforts.